

Observers Praise Georgian Presidential Vote

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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TBILISI — European observers Monday gave Georgia's presidential election a clean bill of health, saying it was "positive and transparent" and confirmed that democracy was strengthening in the former Soviet republic.

"This clean election ... tells me that Georgia's democracy is maturing," said Joao Soares, head of the observer mission sent by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE, Europe's main security and rights watchdog.

Sunday's election was won by Georgy Margvelashvili, the candidate representing the ruling Georgian Dream coalition that ousted President Mikheil Saakashvili's government last year at the polls. He received about 62 percent of votes.

"In a positive and transparent election, the Georgian people have confirmed last year's historic transfer of power," Soares declared in a written statement that said fundamental

freedoms of expression, movement and assembly were respected.

Saakashvili, who ruled for a decade, was unable to take part in the election because he had already served the maximum two terms. Unlike previous elections in post-Soviet Georgia, the vote was free of major violations or violence.

"These elections are an important achievement for the country and for the entire South Caucasus region," Meritxell Mateu Pi, head of a delegation representing the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe said.

Krzysztof Lisek, head of a European Parliament delegation, said the election was an important step for Georgia on its path towards closer ties with the European Union.

The Georgian government hopes to be able to initial an "association agreement," charting a course for deeper integration with the EU, at a summit in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius next month.

Lisek said signing the agreement would depend on "tangible progress in the area of rule of law and democracy."

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